

*File: Argus*

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# The New York Times

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By Hand

Feb. 2, 1959

Dr. James R. Killian, Jr.  
Special Assistant to the President  
for Science and Technology  
White House  
Washington 25, D.C.



Dear Dr. Killian,

As you may know, the New York Times learned of the plans for Argus more than six months ago -- well in advance of its fulfillment. The information was not obtained on an off-the-record basis. Nevertheless we were concerned at the implications of making the project public in advance.

I consulted with Richard Porter, chairman of the IGY Panel on Rockets and Satellites, and as a result we were urgently requested by ARPA not to make any prior disclosure of the project. We were given repeated assurances that we would be given sufficient prior notice of any announcement so that we should be the first to publish it.

To avoid inadvertent disclosure, knowledge of the project has been limited, on the Times, to Hanson Baldwin and myself.

We have consulted on the situation, from time to time, with officials in the Pentagon and elsewhere and understand that a policy decision was made some months ago not to make any disclosure about Argus. Meanwhile, however, there have been a number of developments:

1. Publication by Cristofilos of a report on the Christofilos Effect in terms of the injection of relativistic electrons into the region of closed lines of the earth's magnetic field, using a satellite-borne electron accelerator. Methods for computing longitudinal migration time were given (University of Calif., Radiation Laboratory, Livermore, Calif. UCRL-5407, Nov. 28, 1958)

2. Publication of various reports on the distant effects of a high thermonuclear explosion over Johnston Island on Aug. 1 and again on Aug. 12, 1958, including propagation of aurora 2,100 miles along the geomagnetic meridian, similar propagation of magnetic disturbance and a blackout of radio communications throughout the Pacific

K- 5383



area (Cullington in Nature 182, 1365 (1958); Space Handbook: Astronautics and its Applications, prepared by Rand Corp. for House Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration, made public Jan. 9, 1959).

3. A report by Van Allen that Explorer IV detected a tripling of radiation intensity in association with the Johnston Island explosions (A.A.A.S. Annual Meeting, p.m. session, Dec. 27, 1958, and press conference thereafter).

4. A special report by the National Bureau of Standards, North Atlantic Radio Warning Service on the magnetic disturbance of Sept. 3-4 "difficult to associate ... with any specific solar event." (CRPL-Js 1155-1, Sept. 4, 1958)

5. Questions asked by science writers at the A.A.A.S. annual meeting, such as that which provoked Van Allen's statement in item 3, suggest that some of them are on the track of Argus.

In view of the above, we doubt that we can continue to withhold publication of at least a limited account of Argus. We have consulted with some six scientists who were concerned with the project and are fully briefed on its military implications.

They have been unanimously of the view that disclosure of the experiment, without giving its exact height, input and location, would not disclose anything which was not already known, from the scientific and military point of view. The majority of those consulted were in favor of making the project public.

We have been told that the objections to publication were diplomatic, and fear that partial disclosure would lead to complete disclosure and a reluctance to bring the effect -- and ultimately its military consequences -- to the attention of those abroad who hitherto may not have given them much thought.

Next September the United States will be required, under the terms of its IGY commitments, to publish the telemetered data from Explorer IV (see CSAGI Guide to IGY World Data Centers, Section XI, Article 16). In view of the long battle by the United States to include such a firm commitment in the IGY Guide, it is inconceivable that this country should now back down.

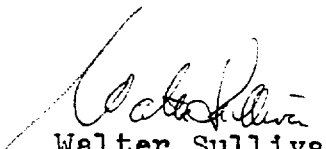


-3-

A number of scientists with whom we have consulted have suggested that I see you before we make our final decision on when and what to publish. I am taking advantage of your presence in New York today to safe-hand this letter to you, but realize that you may wish to think the matter over before we discuss it.

I look forward, therefore, to hearing from you when a meeting would be convenient. I am of course prepared to come to Washington if necessary.

Sincerely yours,

  
Walter Sullivan  
Senior Science Writer

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Page Number

Number  
of  
Pages

30

42

1/19/09

10/26/94